



Magnifying The Dark Side Of The Society In The Novels Of Margaret Atwood

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper portrays the contributions of the most prominent Canadian writer Margaret Atwood regarding social, political, environmental and humanitarian issues persisting in the entire world. Being an outspoken feminist writer, Atwood has shown a mirror image of the society through her works encompassing a variety of themes including male dominance, identity crisis, victimization, social injustice, the power of language, climate change and power politics. The issue of gender is the author's major concern. Most of the female protagonists of the author were in search of their lost identity in the patriarchal society and having a subordinate position revealing their inferior status in society. Moreover, there is realism in Atwood's writings. Everything she wrote was inspired by the real incidents, that already had happened somewhere in the world.

KEYWORDS: Male dominance, identity crisis, social injustice, victimization, power politics, feminist, realism.

INTRODUCTION:

Margaret Atwood's literary contributions left a mark of excellence across the boundaries. The author born on November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Her notable works include novels, short stories, poems and non-fiction. Atwood has garnered lifetime achievement awards: Booker prize, The Governor General's award and The Golden Booker prize along with thirty honorary degrees. The author formed her feminist ideology with the literature of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Betty Friedan. The term of sexual inequality in her dark masterpiece *The Handmaid's Tale* was based on Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'. Margaret Atwood always tried to eradicate the social deformities in the context of feminine and furthermore, she tried to empower women through her appealing literary works.

Throwing light on the remarkable creations of Atwood, the first and finest work: *The Edible Woman*, concerning a young woman's rebellion against a male dominated world and her relationship with her fiancé, which was consuming her inner peace and she lost her identity. She was unable to consume food, may be she was consumed by her fiancé. The story speculates the exploitation of women under a consumer society, where women's body is treated as a toy or a sort of commodity for the gratification of male desires.

The Handmaid's Tale, the haunting dystopia by Atwood which takes her to the celebrity list. This novel earned a huge success and was broadcasted on Hulu's TV show and achieved popularity. The story was set in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian fundamentalist regime that unable the women for their basic human rights. The women were treated as a property of state, where a group of fertile women were forcefully indulged in sexual servitude for high ranked commanders with a view to repopulate a devastated world. All the liberty of these women was snatched and their lives were regulated with continuous surveillance. It exposed the polarized and almost militant political environment of U.S as a fictional narrative. Atwood's novels delve into the complex radical social changes that changed the lives of many people.

The Testaments, a sequel to the blockbuster *The Handmaid's Tale*, narrates the consequent desire of protagonists to attain a freer and better future. Moreover, oppression and domination over female protagonists in *Oryx And Crake* written by Atwood focuses on unjust and terrifying treatment of male characters over female ones including selling, objectifying and mistreating women with a view to dehumanizing them. Atwood's *Blind Assassin* is set in a world stricken with oppression, inequality, economic exploitation, social class division and sexism.

WOMEN STRUGGLES IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S NOVELS

Inferiority Complex: By the keen observation of Atwood's novel there is a clear image of female protagonists, how they grapple with the inferior social status resulting in enslavement and women's subordinate position in the male dominated society. How the women are taken for granted to be treated as a stage prop; silent but solid.

Restricted Autonomy: Atwood's character often confronts restricted autonomy in terms of relationships, personal lives and decision making. The social deformities push them to a bird in a cage situation where they have to do what they are instructed. Which clearly shows the lapse of basic freedom out of their lives.

Identity Crisis: The feminist and humanistic approach of Atwood dealt with the complexities of culturally-encoded concepts of femininity. The pathetic facet of women has been highlighted by Atwood which traces an irrevocable loss of self identity.

Resilience and Awakening: Atwood embeds the concept of survival as a key feature in her novels. The trials made by protagonists to overcome adversities play a vital role to fight back the oppressions. The hope within themselves become catalyst for their survival. Despite of failures, the protagonists were having a ray of hope for a better tomorrow.

Political Pressure: The Handmaid's Tale depicts the dictatorship, tyranny and torture made by government which offers a satirical view of various political, religious and social trends of United States.

Cultural Deformities: The author touches the depth of women helplessness and cultural shock, as in The Handmaid's Tale, the imposed cultural norms that creates docile bodies, which are forced to be enslaved. The powerlessness is used as the strongest form of oppression. Isolation over the minds of women, the trauma caused by the social abnormalities and the challenges faced by female protagonists effects their lives brutally.

Literacy and Resilience :-

Education as Empowerment: In The Testaments by Atwood there is a coordinated action of politics and access to literacy. Orality and literacy are seen as a gender supporting structures. Literacy and story telling are the thematic elements of the text that assumes a future reader of said stories.

Challenges in literacy: Language and literacy are highly controlled by the ruling class of men, Literacy is only permitted to specifically selected women with a view to maintain tenuous political status quo, as per the required skill. Men decide who will learn and what literary material they may consume. So, this was the major obstacle women faced in Atwood's creations, considering that access to literacy directly correlates to the ability to disseminate experiences of oppression.

Education as catalyst to change : As we know, knowledge is the most powerful sword against oppression, a literate woman is indeed a dangerous one as compared to illiterate one. It allows a broader understanding of one's own place in the world, it allows the synchronized efforts for systemic change.

Quest for knowledge: In the stories of Margaret Atwood literacy allows the women to take a wide angle- view of their own position in the society. Women are seen taking risks for acquiring forbidden literacy skills. Their thirst of knowledge make them believe that their gender and biology precludes them from literacy and making them fundamentally incapable. Women are seen to accomplish their goal through covert teaching of literacy and methods of depicting reality when literacy cannot be obtained.

A Weapon To Rebel: The lack of knowledge gives extra power to men to rule over the women likewise in The Handmaid's Tale the women of Gilead are not allowed to receive education because educated women are more likely to rebel against crime as education itself is an ever -permeating force. The education was forbidden for women because it was the biggest weapon to make them powerless, it was a strategy of controlling the sources of information, handmaid's were taught that the primary functions of women is categorized as being a two legged womb in order to repopulate the devastated world. More or less they were of no use if they cannot produce babies for their commanders

Social Exclusion of Women

The society has created a lot of nuisance by excluding the women from every advancement. Cultural inequality is the major problem through which women are given the subordinate position. Women are still excluded from economic, social and political participation and this the main reason for their feeling of alienation. Atwood had clearly mentioned the women characters facing exclusion from every basic human right. They even can't breathe in the fresh air, the humiliating social structure made their lives worst. Basically social exclusion is an existential issue for women everywhere in the world. As a result there is a great need to empower women so that they will not feel isolated and neither used as a commodity anymore. The perspective of women for the society must be changed else she have to suffer on her own.

Conclusion:

Margaret Atwood's literary landscape explores the women's identity and victimization that emerges as an enduring and resonant theme. Going through the writings of Atwood we embark on a journey into the minds and hearts of female characters navigating tapestry of societal norms, power politics, domination and social injustice.

Atwood's story telling criteria lies in her power to weave tolerance and trials together, the protagonists doesn't carry heroism traits but also they were fighting back to change their lives somehow. There is no escapism from adversities but having the power to face struggles.

Traversing through the narratives of Margaret Atwood we witness dark side of society compelling women to be puppets in the hands of man. Women are assumed to be inferior and a subordinate position is given them in the society, but on the other hand we discover the women facing challenges and having a positive thoughts regarding their freer future, they anticipate freedom for themselves and cope up the situation with the help of past memories.

Moreover Atwood gave voice to her characters to narrate their story of sufferings by their own, despite of the brutal society which is engaged to silence her. Which welcomes an expression of positivity. The narratives highlights the ways in which Atwood's dystopia parallels sexist beliefs held by past and present of societies. The characters facing struggles increased their potential to change their perceptions of the world around them. Even though characters are all condemned to have terrible endings, their journey is incredibly alluring, that will keep you on the edge of your seat while reading.

With the qualitative research drawing upon the feminist theory, we delved deep into the narrative techniques, character development and thematic undercurrents in the Atwood's novels. We uncovered the power of language, hope, strength and knowledge in the face of adversities.

Women are displayed as victims in the narratives of Atwood, which is the bitter reality and mirror to the societal abnormalities from eras. Atwood always tried to awaken and strengthen the position of women in the society, she tries to reveal the actual state of society by her appealing masterpieces and jaw dropping stories to shape women's lost identities not only in the literature but also in tapestry of our lives. She compared the current state of women with the one she grew up in, she noted it down that progress in women position has been made but still there is a fight to be had.

According to my opinion there is a need to strengthen the position of women in the society, empowered women represents an empowered country. They must have proportional rights in every area which will dismantle the societal barriers that limits their potential to grow and rise. Until we empower women, they have to face the brunt of climate change. Women's voices must be heard, they must be given chair at the table and the autonomy they desire for.

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